

Painting

Chapter 7



Fauvism and German Expressionism

Comparing Fauvism and German Expressionism

Using Color as an Emotional Tool



Comparing the two art movements of Fauvism and German Expressionism is like looking at two sides of a coin. Both rest on the value of color as applied in painting, but where Fauvists used color to express joy, the artists of the German Expressionist movement manipulated it to convey the darker side of human emotions, ending up with a much different result.

The Fauves

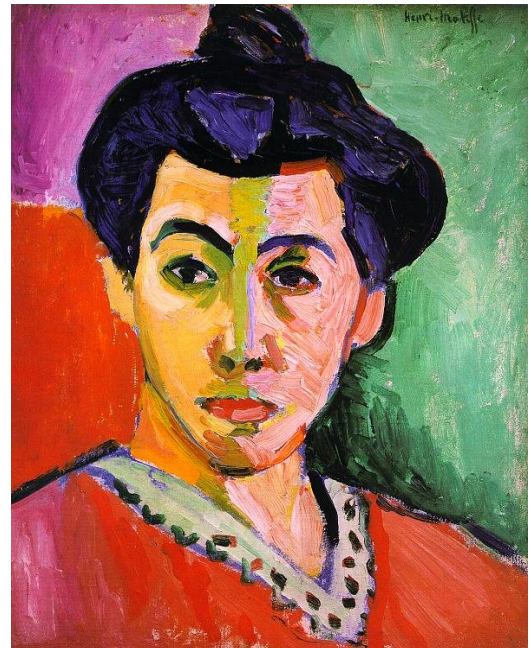
The beginnings of Modernism are often dated by the appearance of the Fauves at the Parisian Salon d'Automne in 1905.

At this exhibition, art critic Louis

Vauxcelles saw the bold paintings surrounding a conventional sculpture, and declared it was like seeing a Donatello *parmi les fauves* ("among the wild beasts"). Although Fauvism was a short-lived art movement, which offered painters the freedom and expressive use of color to showcase their work, it also unleashed a new way of seeing art. Their style of painting, which incorporated non-natural coloring was one of the first Avant Garde developments in European art.

The Fauves greatly admired Van Gogh, who said of his own work, "Instead of trying to re-order what I see before me, I use color in a completely arbitrary way, to express myself powerfully." The Fauves followed this thinking, using color to showcase their feelings in a rough, carefree way.

Many of the Fauves were also inspired by African art, and some artists had amassed significant collections of masks and statues. This fashion for tribal art began with Gauguin, and continued with the Fauves. Henri Matisse, the leader of the Fauve movement, used color in much the same manner as Gauguin and Van Gogh, letting it express the emotional landscape of his paintings, as did other Fauves, like Roualt, Dufy, Vlaminck, Derain, and Braques. Under their brushes, the expressive use of color gave splendid proof of art's



vitality, with a brashness never before seen in the art world

With Matisse and his friends Vlaminck and Derain, color lost its descriptive quality and instead became a source of light, rather than mimicking it. Just a few stunning examples of this unusual use of color can be seen in "The River" (1910) by Vlaminck, in Derain's "Charing Cross Bridge" (1906), and in Matisse's portrait of his wife, "Madame Matisse with a Green Stripe" (1905), where the green stripe's location is down the center of her face.

While Matisse was known as the "king of the Fauves," his celebration of vibrant colors peaked in 1917 when he began to spend time in southern France, along the French Riviera in Nice and Vence, by which time the Fauves had mostly dispersed. Matisse, in fact, was an incredibly controlled artist. There was little wildness in him. His spirit and his mind always had the upper hand over the "beast" of Fauvism. The Fauves were also never a coherent group, with each painter taking his own path, many moving quickly away from Fauvism toward Cubism.

German Expressionism

The German Expressionist movement began at nearly the same period as Fauvism (in 1905), with artists such as Kirchner and Nolde, who leaned toward a Fauvist use of bright color. As "expressionists," these German painters were interested in heightening the emotional landscape of art by placing emphasis on subjective feelings above the portrayal of an objective reality. Like Fauves, their paintings more acutely reflected a state of mind than the reality of the external world, again using color in a strong role. With the Expressionists, however, the importance of color was supplemented by strong linear effects and harsh outlining not seen in Fauvist work.

While in Northern Europe, the Fauves celebrated color, pushing it to new emotional and psychological heights, Expressionism developed along a darker, more somber path, reflecting the societal influences of the day. Characterized by heightened symbolic colors and exaggerated images, German Expressionism tended to dwell on the heavier, more sinister aspects of the human psyche and plumbed its depths.

Although Expressionism exudes a decidedly German character, the work of French painter Roualt links the Fauves to Expressionism better than any other painter in the genre. Using the decorative style of Fauvism in France with the symbolic color use of Expressionism, Roualt's palette and profound subject matter land him clearly as an early proponent of Expressionism. His work was frequently described as "Fauvism with dark glasses," and this perhaps better than any other comparison highlights the differences between the Fauvist and Expressionist styles of painting.

Even in their wildest moments, the Fauves retained a sense of harmony and design, whereas the German Expressionists abandoned such restraint and joy. The Expressionists instead used images of the modern city to convey a hostile, alienating world, with dark colors and distorted figures. There is a powerful sense of violence, contained just beneath the surface in Expressionistic paintings such as Roualt's "Woman at Her Mirror" (1906) and Kirchner's "Berlin Street Scene" (1913).



One of the German Expressionists, Max Beckmann shows in his own work the angst-filled qualities of this painting style. Beckmann's art reflects the stress of his own life through its sheer intensity, with cruel images held in place by solid colors and flat, heavy shapes. By the time of Beckmann, it is clear that Fauvism and German Expressionism had diverged so broadly that the differences became more overriding than the similarities.

Each art style added something unique to art's development, moving along two divergent paths that begin from the same emotional tool: a use of color to convey an artist's feelings. In each, color is not a tool to describe reality but rather to express emotional depth, be it joy (Fauvism) or sorrow (German Expressionism).

Franz Marc

Foxes
(oil on canvas, 1913)
Museum Kunst Palast, Düsseldorf

Franz Marc was an Expressionist painter who formed Der Blaue Reiter group with Wassily Kandinsky. They were part of an artistic movement who were searching for spiritual truth through their art. Marc believed that color had a vocabulary of emotional keys that we instinctively understand, much in the same way that we understand music. This language of color was one tool that Marc used to raise his art to a higher 'spiritual' plane, another was his choice of subject.





Tiger
(oil on canvas, 1912))
Stadtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich

'Tiger' is a typical example of Franz Marc's painting style. It is a fusion of several influences: the expressive and symbolic use of color that he discovered in the paintings of Van Gogh and Gauguin combined with the fragmented and prismatic compositions of various Cubist styles.

The Tiger and its surroundings are composed of geometric shapes whose similarity suggests both the camouflage of the tiger in its natural habitat and the harmony between the creature and its environment. Color is the main element used to separate the tiger from its background. Strong

yellow and black shapes outline its form to convey the markings of the beast. The geometric shapes that make up its form are carefully proportioned and simplified to represent the tiger's features and its muscular body, while their rhythmic movement is echoed in the stylized shapes of the rocks and foliage of the background. This is indeed an idealistic view of nature - an image designed to lift its subject above the brutality of nature in the raw.

By that time he had formed his own set of artistic principles, which were a mixture of Romanticism, Expressionism and Symbolism. In December 1910 he wrote a famous letter to Macke, assigning emotional values to colors:

Blue is the male principle, astringent and spiritual. Yellow is the female principle, gentle, happy and spiritual. Red is matter, brutal and heavy and always the color to be opposed and overcome by the other two.

Blue Horse
(oil on canvas, 1911))
Stadtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich

Franz Marc painted animals as they symbolized an age of innocence, like Eden before the Fall, free from the materialism and corruption of his own time. Animals in Marc's art are seldom painted in isolation. They are viewed as idealized creatures in perfect harmony with the natural world they inhabit.

Franz Marc yearned for a life on a higher spiritual plane. In fact, before he took up art, he studied Theology with a view to entering the priesthood. Ironically, his death was a sad contradiction of his hopes and dreams. He volunteered for service in the army at the start of World War 1 and never painted again. He was killed by a piece of shrapnel in 1916, during the assault on Verdun, the longest and bloodiest battle of the war.



Fauvism and German Expressionism Questions

1. How did the Fauves use color? (to express what emotion?)
2. How did the Expressionists use color?
3. When did Fauvism begin?
4. Who named it? And why?
5. Which artists did the Fauves try to emulate? What was his philosophy about color?
6. They were also inspired by which region artists?
7. Who was the “leader” of the Fauves?
8. What movement later attracted many of the Fauves?
9. What were the German Expressionists trying to accomplish with their art?
10. How did their work differ from the Fauves?
11. What adjectives does the author use to describe Expressionism?
12. Who was Franz Marc?
13. What was he trying to do with his art?
14. What two devices did he use to elevate his art to a “spiritual” realm?
15. How did he integrate expressionist color with cubist shape?
16. What symbolism did Franz Marc assign to his colors?
17. Why were animals an important subject for him?
18. What happened to Franz Marc?